

Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem Team (GLBET) Meeting Minutes December 8-9, 2004 at the John G. Shedd Aquarium

DAY ONE: Introduction and Overview: Rich Greenwood, FWS, began the meeting by providing an overview of the agenda and goals; and introduced Mr. Bert Vescolani, Senior VP of Aquarium Collections and Education at the Shedd Aquarium. Bert welcomed the Team and shared some of the institution's history, as well as its aspirations which include providing more of a window to its "backyard," i.e. the Great Lakes. He looks forward to partnering with the GLBET.

Attendees: ([please see attached list of attendees and contact information](#)) A number of members participated by web-conferencing. Rich asked each participant to share what they like best about the GLBET, while introducing themselves to the group. Responses ranged from liking the "enthusiasm" of the group and its "broad range of expertise" to the opportunity to "get recharged... with new ideas and energy." The recurring theme expressed was that the Team felt like a "family," and that our meeting was a "family gathering."

Speakers: **Marvin Moriarty**, USFWS Region 5 Regional Director, participated in this meeting via speaker phone; he spoke to the group about his vision for the direction of the GLBET, praising its efforts to date, and adding that he believes the GLBET is well-positioned to identify issues critical to the Great Lakes and approach them in a holistic, integrated manner.

Robyn Thorson, USFWS Region 3 Regional Director, addressed the team, saying that she had been briefed by Rich on the team's efforts to date and she's caught the passion for Great Lakes activities. She wants the Team to realize that what we do is extremely important. She and Marvin are now ready to have a substantive GL conversation ("a conversation is a dialogue with a center and no sides,") and schedule a Great Lakes listening session in the Spring of 2005.

Facilitation: Marcia Damato, GLNPO, facilitated the meeting, explaining that time constraints were tight due to a packed agenda but rest assured that all comments would be captured by Christine McConaghy, GLNPO, or Candace Cunningham, EPA R5, the note-takers; or Team members could jot down thoughts and ideas on post-it notes and attach them to the flipcharts organized by topic and these will be transcribed.

Presentations by each of the GLBET Committees: (The following are summaries of the presentations: if you would like a copy of a specific presentation or have any questions regarding it, please contact the presenter using the contact information provided. Team website manager Anjie Bowen will be posting the presentations our Team website: <http://greatlakes.fws.gov/>)

1. Islands: Megan Seymour, Chair, gave the Team an update on the tremendous progress that the Islands group has made since receiving a FY 2004 grant from the Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) and an additional \$100,000 in FY 2005. Megan also apprised the group of related domestic and international efforts to conserve islands. Visit their website at <http://www.nemw.org/islands1.htm>.

Dave Ewert, The Nature Conservancy Great Lakes Program, presented the just released Great Lakes Islands Ranking Report, which the Team had secured Service Flexible Funds to complete. Dave explained the criteria for ranking the island ecosystems. He explained that

the group decided not to engage in a very, lengthy, exhaustive process for defining an island; they developed criteria and a scoring procedure which can be refined over time. Dave explained the criteria in detail, e.g. land bird stopover sites. The Island Ranking Report will be particularly useful to our Refuge Managers, and others involved in island conservation, and is available upon request.

2. Lake Sturgeon: Emily Zollweg, Chair, updated the group on this committee's 2004 activities, e.g. Tributary Inventory Database and GIS, and Commercial Fishers Tagging Project. She summarized this committee's unmet needs, e.g. funded position, and Basinwide Lake Sturgeon Rehabilitation Plan (this has been on the list since 1997!).

3. Endangered Species: Jack Dingledine, Co-Chair, explained that this committee is relatively new; it is in the fledging stage, seeking its niche. (Their initial goal was to be more habitat-focused than species-specific). In the first year, they applied the NOAA Logic model (see Team Website) to focus their thinking, and decided to focus on one habitat area (inland wetlands, fens, and bogs). They are hoping for more participation from the filed stations, and they welcome feedback.

The group was then treated to a tour of the Aquarium Galleries conducted by Bert Vescolani and Jim Robinette prior to breaking for lunch.

4. Outreach: Rachel Levin, Chair, presented the committee's Action Plan for 2005. Priorities include supporting the Great Lakes Executive Order, development of GLBET framework, AZA MOU, as well as committee activities such as invasive species outreach and migratory birds strategic planning. She would like funding to complete a video outreach project; as well as the continued (moral) support for the committee's work

5. GIS/Decision Support: Chris Castiglione, Chair, updated the group on the four major projects that this group has undertaken: islands decision support, lake sturgeon decision support, spatial data development, and GIS coordination and partnerships. He sees this committee's role as providing support to GLBET committees and partners.

6. Invasive Species: Mike Goehle, Co-Chair, posed the questions of what can this group achieve with limited time and budget? There are a lot of opportunities and the committee is open to new ideas. He would like to increase committee membership thereby increasing the diversity of member backgrounds and ideas. Mike mentioned the need to look at basinwide monitoring of invasives – and the need to coordinate this. A key need is to disseminate information to the public highlighting the need for prevention and not management of invasive species. (I.e. in Region 3, there is a new kiosk being developed in partnership with a major sporting goods store chain with Great Lakes invasives information.)

7. Website Management: Angie Bowen, Team Web Site Manager, explained the website has been updated to include Migratory Birds, Coastal Habitat, Endangered Species Committees and their accomplishments. There's great information on grant funding in the Coastal Program area of the website. She discussed the possibility of changing the look of the site to better "tell our story."

Presentations of Collaborative Opportunities:

8. Migratory Bird Program Strategic Plan: Bob Russell, GLBET Great Lakes Migratory Bird Conservation Co-Lead, provided a hand-out entitled, “Great Lakes Birds Issues” to the group. He said that a few weeks earlier, a pair of whooping cranes roosted at Lake Calumet overnight for the first time in recorded memory since 1875! He updated us on what’s happening in each of the states, e.g. the new release of the Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas. He explained the Upper Mississippi Valley/ Great Lakes Waterbird Conservation Plan, and mentioned the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies being developed for 2005. *Bob raised the issue of wind farms to the group and emphasized the lack of scientific information on how they affect migratory bird populations. This idea really captured the imagination and interest of our group and fostered animated discussion. The group plans to follow up on this issue in a conference call/web conferencing meeting.*

9. Globally Significant Migratory Bird Stopover Sites Demonstration Project: Dave Ewert, GLBET Great Lakes Migratory Bird Conservation Co-Lead, provided GIS imagery showing the distribution of migratory birds, and explained the critical importance of stopover sites due to incredible energy demands of migration. (There are even reports of birds resting on ships in the middle of the lakes.) He noted that Lake Erie, for example, is a critical area which is under considerable pressure. Collaboration is essential: Think Globally, Act Locally is essential here.

10. Conservation Blueprint for the Great Lakes: Mary Khoury, TNC Midwest- Canada Division, passed out copies of this document which provides a wonderful overview of significant biodiversity areas in the basin. She shared TNC’s ideas for compiling a comprehensive catalog with tiered site-specific information and asked the group for feedback on what information would be most useful to include considering the audience, lay-out, and proposed content.

11. Mapping Great Lakes Habitat: John Perrecone, USEPA, provided an overview of current Great Lakes Basin mapping efforts, including the USEPA’s Critical Ecosystem Assessment Model (CrEAM,) TNC’s Canadian Conservation Blueprint, and State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference Biodiversity Areas. All were developed for different purposes but there are some areas of “high convergence.” He pondered what might be missing from this analysis, and asked why there aren’t more sites of high convergence? He emphasized the importance of the landscape-level approach, and put in a plug for the Midwest Natural Resources Managers Group as a possible venue for proposing future projects and promoting collaboration.

12. Forming a Department of the Interior Great Lakes Framework/Partnership: Norm Granneman, USGS Great Lakes Coordinator, spoke about the opportunities inherent in the new Great Lakes Executive Order Regional Collaboration. He said we need to identify areas where different Federal partners already have an interest, and optimize our resources, e.g. Sleeping Bear Dunes, the Indiana Dunes, and Pictured Rocks. He mentioned USGS’ Water Availability project which will emphasize ground water but also include surface water and water use components – of course, the bigger research question is: how much water is needed for Great Lakes Ecosystem Function?

13. Shedd Aquarium Coastal America Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center and American Zoological and Aquarium Association Great Lakes Partnerships: Jim

Robinette, Shedd Aquarium Senior Vice President and AZA Vice-Chair Federal Government Affairs Committee, discussed the Memorandum of Understanding between Service and the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. He highlighted Shedd's strengths in public education and display, including the website and distance-learning capabilities. The AZA members' combined yearly audience is larger than the combined yearly attendance at all major professional sports facilities combined! Jim said the Shedd is developing displays on invasive species and next year, they are converting five tanks to species of regional significance, ex. Asian Carp. There are myriad opportunities for collaboration.

DAY TWO:

Dave Ewert presented certificates of appreciation for those who significantly helped with the Islands Collaborative on behalf of Karen Vigmostad, Collaborative Chair – GLBET Island Committee – NEMWI, to the following Team Members: Megan Seymour, Karen Rodriguez, Dave Ewert, and Rich Greenwood.

14. Great Lakes Invasive Species on the Ground Action Partnership Opportunities:

John Perrecone, USEPA, gave a presentation on an Midwest Natural Resources Group project to remove garlic mustard at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

15. St. Lawrence River – Lake Ontario Wetlands Management District and Islands:

Tom Jasikoff, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge Manager, gave an inspirational presentation on this Refuge and new, exciting developments. Tom stressed that while philosophical discussions regarding restoration goals can be interesting, they are often esoteric and it's much more important to be "a doer."

16. Great Lakes Areas of Concern Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Restoration: Matt Doss, Great Lakes Commission (via phone) and Karen Rodriguez, GLNPO, discussed progress thus far on setting delisting targets for habitat beneficial use impairments (BUI) beginning with those on Michigan. They emphasized the need for planning and goal-setting with local groups to develop site-specific targets. Proceedings from the Michigan workshop may be found at <http://www.glc.org/spac/>. Regional consistency is important. Partners are welcomed in this effort, e.g. FWS, TNC, et al.

17. Region 3 FWS Excellence Initiative and Great Lakes Listening Session: Teresa Woods and Tom Magnuson (FWS) updated the group on these two issues.

18. Chicago Wilderness: John Rogner said that they have finished a five-year planning process with the goal of re-connecting urban dwellers with nature, and discussed a number of different programs. Other cities, such as Cleveland, are using Chicago Wilderness as a model.

19. Charlie Wooley, Region 3 Deputy Regional Director, talked about the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and opportunities for the FWS to participate. He emphasized that FWS can't afford to miss this "train" as it "leaves the station."

20. Great Lakes Congressional – Restoration Legislation: Karen Vigmostad, NEMWI Great Lakes Policy Analyst, provided an update on the Congressional Task Force and related government issues. She said we need to protect the "line programs."

21. Draft Outline: Building the USFWS Great Lakes Strategic Framework: The draft outline of this framework was presented. **Action Item:** Team Members are requested to review and comment on the draft outline ([attached](#)), help vet the document, and prepare it for presentation to our two Regional Directorates for consideration.

During the rest of the meeting, the group discussed the many opportunities for collaboration and teamwork. The comments, as well as Service Great Lakes unmet needs, were recorded on post-it notes were organized on flip charts for each committee, and will be posted on the website for future use. ([soon to be attached](#)) **Action items:** Committee Chairs and Executive Committee Members are urged to review these suggestions. **Action items** identified will be listed and tracked.

The participants also discussed the nexus for GLBET participation in the "big picture" of Great Lakes Initiatives and partnerships, with the help of diagrams created by Marcia Damato. Marcia's presentation/breakdown was very well received, and as requested, they have been reproduced for our use, see the two attached diagram files.

Team members agreed upon several key opportunities for the GLBET to maximize its impact. Consensus was reached on the need to address information gaps with respect to the impacts of wind and communication towers on birds (as well as bats!). It was agreed that this was a viable project for this group to embrace. Marcia volunteered to be a temporary repository for information on this topic. A conference call/web conference meeting will be planned to discuss next steps for this. **Action item:** Marcia will gather all information submitted and arrange next conference call for a subcommittee to work on this issue.

The second key opportunity is participation in the eight Issue Area Strategy Teams of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration / Executive Order. GLBET could be a venue to coordinate Service involvement; "the biggest role could be communication among members of the GLBET."

Finally, there was a discussion of the current direction and needs of the GLBET committees, priorities, and leadership. **Action item** proposed: to develop simple, integrative criteria/framework to guide the GLBET in deciding where to engage its time and resources. The meeting generated real energy and momentum that we can use to catalyze action for the Great Lakes. We will be scheduling follow-up, and look forward to your continuing participation